

# Confessions of a Community Manager

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# This presentation will explore:

What is a Community Manager?

Is my open source project ready for a C.M.?

What benefits can a C.M. provide?

What exactly does a C.M. do?

What pitfalls can the C.M. expect?

# Disclaimer

This presentation is based on my experience and observations

Every community is different (size, culture, values, goals, personalities)

YMWV (your mileage will vary)

# What is a Community Manager?

One definition:

1. Community Advocate
2. Brand Evangelist
3. Savvy Communication Skills
4. Gathers Community Input

<http://www.web-strategist.com/blog/2007/11/25/the-four-tenets-of-the-community-manager/>

# **Is my open source project ready for a community manager?**

Consider your project's size, maturity level, diversity of roles, and organizational structure.

# Organizational Structure

What type of software is created and who is the intended audience?

What is the relationship between developers and non-developers? Or are the users of the product primarily developers?

What is the ratio between contributors and non-contributors? Is the community satisfied with that ratio or does it have a goal to increase contributions?

# Organizational Structure

Is there an associated foundation, academic institution, non-profit organization, or company that supports the project? If not, are there any similar projects or associations the project can partner with?

Or is it a company wanting to open source a product in order to create or work more closely with an existing community?

# Funding Relationship

Are any community members currently paid to work on the project? (e.g. through their employer, academic funding, a foundation)

What is the *cultural attitude* towards being paid to work on the project?

Are any sources of funding available or will this be a voluntary position? If voluntary, consider a team approach.

**What benefits can a community manager provide to the community?**

In other words, why bother having one?

# Increased Exposure

Perception that Community Managers are associated with “mature” projects that have stood the test of time

Obvious point of contact for media requests and interviews

Provides an(other) “official” spokesperson for the project

# Better Use of Resources

Let project members concentrate on what they're good at: e.g. let developers write code rather than spend time answering questions, doing interviews, etc.

Make sure answers are technically correct and meet cultural tone/standards of community

# Liaison

Point new community members to the correct resources (documentation and people)

Keep developers aware of users' needs and users of developers' progress and restraints

Interact with other communities to promote beneficial relationships

Promote the project outside the community

# Pursue Opportunities

An amazing amount of stuff can fall through the cracks: new users who leave, missed contributions, unanswered questions, unimplemented features, etc.

A Community Manager provides focus: what does our community need? how can we make things easier so stuff gets done? how can we get more people involved so that the community grows and remains vibrant?

# **What exactly does a community manager do?**

Exact duties depend upon the project's needs, goals, and priorities. Rest assured that this is definitely a full time job, and then some. A Community Manager's to-do list will take on a life of its own. If this is a voluntary position, consider creating a team to prevent burnout.

# Social Media

Blog daily as this is your project's lifeline to the community and the world at large. The blog lets readers know what the project is up to, what software needs testing, how readers can contribute, etc. Respond to all blog comments in a timely fashion.

Make sure the project has an official Facebook group, twitter account, etc. and that blog postings automatically get posted to these outlets.

# Communication Channels

Review existing channels to see if they meet the needs of the community (developers and users)

Subscribe to community's mailing lists and forums and lurk on IRC channels with the goal of pointing people in the right direction and making sure stuff gets addressed (or at least answered) in a timely fashion

# Event Planning

Arrange interviews and press releases

Arrange representation at conferences and other events; encourage community members to respond to CFPs

Apply for Summer of Code and similar bounty opportunities

Arrange bugbusters, doc-athons, code sprints

# Motivate Users

Encourage new contributions (e.g. walk someone through their first bug report)

Address documentation gaps (coding style, how to contribute, tasks lists)

Look for ways to reduce contribution curve

Recognize new contributions and champion new contributors

**What pitfalls can the community manager expect to encounter?**

# Resistance

Be prepared for initial skepticism--start plowing through your to-do list, at some point most will get that you are for real and are an asset to the community

Some people will never forgive you for getting paid--you'll need a thick skin to wade through resentment

# Stranger

Don't hire a stranger: a well respected community member will meet less resistance than a well qualified person hired from outside the community

Finding the best person for the job can be more difficult for a company starting an open source project--if possible, choose someone who has interacted with users in the past

# Intended Audience

You may be surprised to realize your community's actual audience does not match the original “itch”

The community's road map should allow for course corrections

# Transparency

Be honest in all of your communications

Noone can be expected to do everything,  
know everything, catch everything--admit  
when you fail and work towards getting  
other people to contribute (e.g. aim to make  
your position obsolete)

# Discussion

URL to slides:

[http://www.slideshare.net/dlavigne  
/scale9x\\_fri](http://www.slideshare.net/dlavigne/scale9x_fri)

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